

Without You

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Summary: Garrus and Shepard never really imagine what life would be like after the War, but they did know that, after everything, they would have each other. Their family grows - can anyone say unintentional adoption? - and they keep in touch with the crew of the Normandy as the years pass by. Full of humour and romantic moments, this a farewell love letter to the ME universe.
Post-destroy.

Without You

Author's note: This story is about femShep/Shakarian after a Destroyer ending. Happy reading!

* * *

><p>The Normandy landed at the nearest Alliance port and Garrus didn't even bother with the check-in. He strode right by, startling the guards, but Jeff hobbled off the ship as fast as he could behind him, talking the jumpy soldiers down, Liara helping.<p>

It had been 12 days since the Reapers had been brought down and the Earth was in chaos. Garrus, already in hell, didn't notice. The days of repairing the Normandy on that jungle planet had been a blur of desperate motion and planning. He was going to go out there and find out what happened to Shepard even if he had walk there himself. His visor was plotting a course to the epicenter, when someone grabbed his arm.

It was a human soldier and he was about to jerk his arm out of their grasp when she let go of his arm and held up a hand, the other pressed to her ear.

"Roger that, I'll do that Sir," she said into her ear piece, her assault rifle held casually in her other hand. "Admiral Hackett has asked that I show you to Commander Shepard, sir."

His mandibles went slack and blood rushed in his ears. He stared at her.

"She's alive, Sir. She survived."

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"The hospital, it's bad but--"

But Garrus wasn't listening, he took off, barreling through the crowds as if they weren't there.

Garrus ran down the airplane hangar full of some of the wars' worst casualties and barely registered them. It was like he was drifting on another plane, through a world of ghosts, and the only thing that could make the world real again was Shepard, alive and well.

Once, he had asked the universe for just one thing to go right, now, he was begging " pleading " for just one more thing. Just one more.

The nurse opened the door to Shepard's own room, full of beeping machines, and Garrus' eyes went to the body lying in the bed. It was her. She was a mess of small cuts, more still and pale than he had ever seen before. He was a man inclined to expect the worst but there she was, the machines were beeping steadily, telling him she was alive. He could barely breath.

Kaidan was by her side, holding her hand - the one not surrounded in a halo of wires. He looked up, not surprised that Garrus had rushed in like a tempest.

"She's going to be ok," he said in his soft voice, "They got her out of the wreckage fast. She has been in a coma, but it's nothing physical. She woke up yesterday for a minute."

Garrus had to replay the words back in his mind.

"She's going to be ok, Garrus," Kaidan repeated, knowing that he was having a hard time processing. "I'll let you sit with her for a while."

Kaidan got up from the bedside chair and gave Garrus an understanding nod.

She was going to be ok, Garrus repeated over and over in his mind like a mantra, barely believing.

He sank heavily into the chair and the last week and half seemed to wash over him, crashing down until he felt exhausted. He reached out his taloned hand and held hers. Round tipped fingers capped with delicate nail, rough from years of shooting a gun and saving the universe.

Please, he begged again. Let just one more thing go right.

He slumped forward and rested his face in her lap, bringing her hand to the side of his scarred face so that he could feel her pulse beating as he closed his eyes and waited, drifting numbly into the black arms of sleep.

"Garrus." The voice seemed to come from far away, but he struggled toward the sound.

A hand stroked his fringe, light as a butterfly. He opened his eyes and slowly sat up. He looked at Shepard.

"Garrus," said Shepard again, her blue-grey eyes barely staying open. But she was looking at him. She was awake. She was alive.

He felt like he had been punched in the stomach, un able to draw a full breath. Her hand rose weak but to determined to stroke the scarred side of his face. Garrus enveloped it in his own, clutching it to his cheek.

"Shepard," he managed to say. He fluttered his mandibles in her palm in an approximation of a human kiss. "Shepard, Shepard, Shepard."

It was the one true prayer he ever uttered. She smiled, hazy and in pain, but she smiled. His heart constricted painfully. Her eyes fluttered closed again.

"It looks-" she said, each word a challenge for her as sleep threatened to drag her back. "It looks like that drinkâ€¦ is going to have toâ€¦ wait."

He was stunned for a moment. Here Shepard was, in the worst condition he had ever seen her in, and she was making a joke. Garrus half laughed, half sobbed, and buried his head in the blankets at her waist, unable to deal with the torrent of emotions burning through him, squeezing his heart.

Her fingers gently stroked his fringe until they gently fell still. Shepard was asleep again. She would live.

After a long while Garrus leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling, imagining he could see all the way to the end of space and time.

"Thank-you," he sighed.

* * *

><p>Shepard's recovery was remarkably quick and in just a month she was on her feet, insisting that she was fine. While they cautioned her to take it easy, the doctors agreed with her. After that no one but the Alliance military could keep her down, but they had no intention of doing any such thing.<p>

A symbol of hope, Admiral Hackett called her, though it made her roll her eyes. The Alliance asked her to go out and visit the places that were hit the hardest by the Reapers, make a show of helping with the efforts to rebuild and keep people's spirits up.

Shepard didn't mind the helping. She was a woman who could not sit still and Garrus was always a little surprised that he didn't wake up to an empty bed more often than not. If anyone could have found a way to work in their sleep, Shepard would have.

The crew of the Normandy changed a lot in the two years after the

War.

Treynor stayed on, Joker didn't. James went into N7 training and passed with flying colours. Cortez still insisted that he was the only one capable of flying Shepard's transport vehicle. Archeology and her Shadow Broker duties eventually called Liara away. Kaidan was given a ship of his own so he could pursue his Spectre duties. And EDI she was one of the casualties of destroying the Reapers.

Shepard still missed her omnipresence, especially in the dead of night. The Normandy felt a little hollow without her, as if the halls echoed a little differently.

Life settled into a routine again, one that was quieter than any of them could ever remember. The problems that cropped up seemed a lot smaller than they used to be.

Shepard, spending her nights cuddled up next to a Turian, was finally feeling well-rested.

Then an urgent message came from Tuchanka, requesting Shepard's immediate assistance. Prepared for the worst, the Normandy changed course and made straight for Krogan DMZ.

* * *

><p>"I'm glad that you're both here," said Wrex.<p>

"What's the trouble you're having?" asked Shepard, looking around. For the base of Clan Urdnot, it was fairly quiet, almost suspiciously peaceful.

"Trouble? Oh, a few rogue clans, but we can take care those ourselves. No, I have something I want to discuss with you. Well, Bakara does. She's already talked my ear off, now she can talk yours off."

Bakara swatted at him, "You're useless."

Wrex shook his head and stomped off to go yell at two Krogan repairing a Tomkah.

Garrus and Shepard shared a look.

Bakara waited till the sound of Wrex's shouting faded away and then snorted.

"There was an accident. It happens sometimes. We've been reproducing so fast it's inevitable that we have to spread out. Wrex has been negotiating with the council for a few more colonies."

Garrus made a face. "Let's hope they actually listen this time. If I have to hear about another the possibility of another Krogan Rebellion I might just trot myself past the Omega 4 relay and retire."

"Well, a convoy out in the more deserted parts of Tuchanka got attached," continued Bakara

"Thresher maw?"

"Who's telling the story here?"

Garrus closed his mouth, chastened, and after a minute Bakara continued.

"One of the convoys got attacked by a thresher maw, almost no one was left alive. One of our daughters was in the convoy and she didn't make it. She left behind her brood, just hatched. It's a lot of Krogans without caretakers. Of course we can find willing homes, children are more precious than after the genophage, but we were wondering if you two would think of adopting?"

"A whole brood?" asked Garrus, mandibles slack.

"Are all men morons?" Bakara waved her hands impatiently, "Just one. Wrex is warlord now, but shaping up the tribes is like trying to box with a kakilosaur."

"I'd still bet on Wrex," interjected Shepard.

"Me too, that man has a head like a block of stone. But we need to start shaping the next generation and focus some of the Krogan heat. We're going to need ambassadors, writers and scholars if we're going to move forward, so we need to start learning from the rest of the galaxy."

"Did they say yes yet?" bellowed Wrex from across the compound.

"I haven't asked them yet!" she yelled back, and turned to the stunned couple. "So the opportunity to adopt is there, and I can think of no one better to raise a Krogan than one of the saviours of the Krogan."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, I wouldn't say I was a _savior_," protested Garrus.

"I was talking about Shepard."

"Well, I helped a little."

"Wow, Bakara. This isâ€¦" Shepard trailed off. "Can we have a day to think about it? I mean, we've basically been living on the Normandy. We're not really set up to raise a child."

"Sure, take a day."

* * *

><p>"â€¦And then he sticks the ice down his pants and slumps on the bar and bellows for more ice," finished Shepard. "If that man hasn't sired half of Tuchanka by now than I'm Blasto."<p>

Garrus, laughed so hard he nearly shot whiskey out of his nose. As his laughter wound down they both looked at each other, grinning, and thinking the same thing.

"Are we out of our minds for considering this?" Shepard asked.

"I don't think so," he mused, "Not more than usual anyway. We have had a lot more encounters with Reapers than any sane person ever has. How hard can it be for an interspecies, human-turian couple to raise Krogan baby?"

"Well, you did promise me a Krogan baby that one time."

Garrus face grew distant, remembering their goodbye, and seeing her making that last desperate dash for the beam and the darkness that shadowed him for those two weeks when he was sure she was beyond his reach.

"I did, didn't I?" he said softly, grasping her hand to reassure himself that Shepard was still in front of him.

"You did."

He gathered her in his arms, his hands on her waist so that they were forehead to forehead.

"Well," he said in a cocksure tone, as they both swayed gently from side to side, "Then why the hell not?"

* * *

><p>Bakara put the small bundle in Shepard's arms, a smile on her heavy features, "His mother was considering Konga, but he hasn't been named yet, so the honour is yours."<p>

"What about something like Mordin?" Shepard mused.

Bakara and Wrex laughed.

"Every Krogan from here to the next system has named a few of their kids Mordin. If you had told me that Krogan would be naming their kids after a Salarian scientist 20 years ago I would have happily but a bullet in your brain and then called you a liar," grumbled Wrex. "And Shepard, lots Krogan naming their spawn Shepard. We have enough Mordins and Shepards that they could start their own colony. Hmmâ€| actually, that's not a bad idea."

Bakara rolled her eyes. "He is your son now so choose whatever name you wish."

"Konga doesn't sound so bad," said Garrus.

"Konga it is," said Shepard, passing him to Garrus.

"Watch out, they grow fast. He'll be crawling in about a week," said Wrex slyly.

"He, waitâ€| what?" asked Garrus. Shepard looked at Bakara for reassurance.

"Relax, Garrus," said Wrex thumping Garrus on the carapace. "Grow a quad. Your wife already has."

"I'm quite happy with two testicles, thanks."

Wrex grabbed Garrus by both side of his face, and dragged it down

until they were nearly nose to nose, his face the picture of seriousness.

"That's 'cause you've never had four."

* * *

><p>Turns out that raising a Krogan baby was just as hard as it sounds.<p>

The two were run ragged a few months later, when Jacob's fundraiser for war orphans came up. Shepard had agreed to be the guest of honor in order to garner more support, a decision she was regretting as she was forced to get ready.

"I spent years yelling that the Reapers were coming and nobody bats an eye. I say, hey, adopt a kid, and everyone is supposed to jump?" she ranted at Garrus.

"Humans are notoriously fickle."

"And I have to dress up? Can't I show up in my military fatigues and call it a night?"

"Don't deprive me of you in a dress. You cut a fine figure all dolled up," he said admiringly from the bed. She put a leg up on the bed next to him and seductively brushed her hand up her ankle and winked. Garrus felt the pit of his stomach drop.

"Or we could just stay in and I'll take my time taking that dress off of you."

"No, I accidentally promised to be there," she said, then paused to look him on the bed, still wearing his armour. "Well, if I can't wear my uniform you certainly can't wear that armour."

"But honey, there is a hole in my good dress clothes."

"It can't be that bad, let me seeâ€| Garrus, is that a bullet hole?"

"Don't judge me."

* * *

><p>Shepard had to make the opening speech at the gala, which Garrus fed to her from the corner. He was better with words that she was - when it came to this sort of thing anyway. Had Jacob wanted her to rally them for life or death battle against the Reapers she could have handled that quite handily herself.<p>

People â€" people of Earth â€" in particular, still looked at them funny when she reached out to take Garrus' hand or he put his arm around her and whispered a joke in her ear, but the two were so used to it, it was almost a game between them now. She forgot sometimes how insular a planet could be. People on the Citadel barely gave it a thought.

All in all the fundraiser wasn't all that bad. Miranda and Liara made an appearance. Jack declined the invitation, saying not so politely

that she would happily be anywhere else, even though Shepard knew for a fact that she volunteered to take some of the kids on field trips when she had time.

"God, can you imagine Jack telling someone to adopt kids? People would take one look at her tattoos and bad attitude and would swear off kids forever." Miranda asked, taking a glass of wine from the waiter.

"Be nice," scolded Liara.

"I thought you two were getting along better," said Shepard.

"We are, but we get along best when we're on different planets," replied Miranda, taking a sip of her drink.

"Ladies," said Jacob, approaching with his arms wide, "Each one of you is a fresh and delicate vision of loveliness."

The three turned to look at him, not sure if they should demonstrate how not delicate the three of them were.

"I thought you were married now, Jacob," Miranda said, deciding to just be amused.

"Don't worry, I know you're not delicate flowers."

"How many kids is that now, Jacob?" asked Liara pointedly.

"Four," muttered Jacob.

"I see," said Shepard. "And yet, you still haven't figured out how to give a compliment."

"So much for trying," he sighed. "Shepard, you were just the woman I was looking for. Great speech out there."

"I was betting that she was going to go out there and say 'I'm Commander Shepard and this is my favourite store on the Citadel.'"

"Miranda," shrieked Liara, spitting her drink back into her glass. "I don't think you can say that."

"Can and did."

"Anyway, there is someone I want you to meet," said Jacob, leading Shepard away.

"Delicate flower," she heard Miranda muttered into her drink.

Jacob led her out of the giant hall to a side room where a bunch of kids were playing, the children of the guests, being minded while their parents enjoyed the fundraiser.

"You remember my wife, Brynn," said Jacob, he said, kissing her on the cheek.

"It's good to see you again." Shepard gave her a hug, careful not squish the baby in her arms.

"And this is who I wanted you to meet," said Jacob, taking the baby from Brynn.

Shepard smiled down at the baby, cradled in Jacob's arms, sucking on her fist. "Aww. She adorable. Yours?"

"No, this little girl is up for adoption."

Shepard was silent for a beat as his words sunk in. "Oh no, Jacob, you're not thinkingâ€¦"

"I was just wondering if you could think of a good home for her."

Shepard stared at the little girl, and the girl stared back. She was almost a year old and had a chin tilt that she almost recognised from the mirror.

"I'll go get Garrus," she said, resigned.

* * *

><p>"A little human girl," mused Garrus on the way home, his eyes on the night sky. "We have one, why not two?"<p>

"Why not just do as the Krogans do?" retorted Shepard, "We could just have 1000."

"She even kind of looked like you."

"You're just saying that."

"Big blue-grey eyes you could get lost in. A determined look that could take down a charging Elcor at 30 yards. It was uncanny really."

"How would Konga take to having a sibling?"

"Good thing she doesn't look like me. That would be terrifying," he went on, not listening.

"Garrus, I'm serious," Shepard prodded.

"Like you said, Konga probably has 1000 siblings out there somewhere. One more won't kill him."

There was silence in the skycar as both of them thought up various impossible scenarios that involved having two kids. After a long while, Shepard broke the silence.

"Why do all our friends keep giving us babies?"

* * *

><p>Where once there was one, now there was two, and the differences between a Krogan baby and a human baby were many and numerous. Getting into trouble, though, that was something they had in common.<p>

Konga was a one-baby cannonball who had entered his headbutting stage - a stage that Wrex gleefully told them would last for several years. Shepard got very good at repairing holes in walls.

Tali was blissfully less of force of unstoppable nature. She cried loudly and certainly got into as much trouble as they would let her get away with, and more, but she was certainly easier to whisk away from impending danger than Konga, who was clocking in at 60 lbs.

Konga adjusted to having another presence in the house. He revelled in showing off for anyone who would watch and applaud, and his biggest fan was Tali. She would watch him go with wide eyed fascination, as he leapt off of couches, ran around with a model Normandy and fought off Reapers and thresher maws. Tali would shout words of encouragement in her halting language that Konga seemed to have no trouble understanding.

The day that Shepard and Garrus both dreaded was the day she started truly copying Konga.

Despite all the headaches and the long days of running after anklebiters, the two had seen worse.

There was only one day that ever really phased them. Tali was two and a half; Konga was four.

Konga and Tali were playing in the living room and Shepard, getting some work done at the desk in the den, was watching. Garrus was out. Konga, testing out his Krogan aggression stances lowered his head and growled at Tali. Tali, giggling, tilted her head down and growled right back. Then Konga charged and there was a solid thunk as a heavily reinforced Krogan skull met a thin human one. Shepard heard it from where she was sitting and was up at FTL speed, taking one look at the little girl and calling for an ambulance.

Konga looked on, terrified, knowing that he had hurt Tali. He was unusually still as he regarded his sister.

Tali was extremely dazed, blood dripping from a gash on her forehead. Her skull was severely bruised, but not fractured, said Shepard's omni-tool, probably concussed. Shepard pinged Garrus to let him know what happened as she used the other hand to hold a rag to Tali's head. The ambulance was there in minutes. The three piled in and were whisked to the hospital where a brisk Salarian doctor informed a grim faced Shepard that Tali would be fine, but they wanted to run some tests.

Konga was unusually silent, waiting for Shepard's anger.

Instead she sat them in a corner of the waiting area and took Konga's hand. "I'm not going to yell at you," she said softly. He was so worried that his cheeks were puffed out. "Seeing Tali in pain is punishment enough."

Konga nodded, and looked at the door where his sister had disappeared.

"But Konga, you have to realise you're different than Tali," she continued, switching to the stern voice she used to keep rogue

soldiers in line, "There are going to be somethings that you can do that she can't. Her head plates are never going to be as strong as yours."

She wrapped him firmly on the head to illustrate her point.

"You are going to have think about your actions before you make them. We all do, otherwise some will get hurt. One day you're going to be a big man with a lot of strength, if you're not careful you could do a lot worse than give someone a concussion. Do you understand me, Konga?"

He nodded solemnly, looking close to tears. Shepard put both hands on the side of his face and touched her forehead gently to his.

"Be gentle with your sister," she said kindly.

"Yes, Mama," said Konga, and he took her hand, a gesture he hadn't made since he had started walking.

They waited for Tali together.

Garrus was at home by the time Tali was released from the hospital. He gathered Tali in his arms and checked her over, inspecting the bandage on her head.

Then he immediately held her up so that they were face to face.

"Look Shepard, she's truly our daughter. She's got your who's-the-Commander-here glare and my scars," he said, fluttering his mandibles on the side of Tali's face in the way that made her howl with laughter.

"Careful Garrus, the doctors just minimized her concussion. Don't give her another one," Shepard scolded. Garrus put Tali down and went to Konga, who was quietly colouring on the floor.

"Tough day?" he asked Konga. The boy nodded, looking chastened.

"Did I ever tell you about this one abysmal day I had? I was a C-Sec officer and this Asari officer named Juno kept found a way to hack my HUDâ€|" he said, and launched into a story that, by the end, had Konga smiling.

They ordered in Chinese food for dinner that night and dextro-sushi for Garrus. Putting the two to bed that night was easier than it had been in a long time.

When the apartment was quiet Shepard lay on the couch gingerly and groaned. Garrus handed her a whiskey which she down all in one.

"Hey, that was premium whiskey, not the swill Krogan usually call alcohol," he tsked, and handed her a second drink which she drank far slower.

"What a day," Shepard groaned, making room for Garrus on the couch.

"Well the crew was bound to come under fire one of these days. Was it the scariest day of your life?"

Shepard snorted. "Hardly."

"My mistake I am talking to the woman who once summoned the Mother of All Thresher Maws."

"No, that wasn't it either." She took another sip of alcohol.

"So what was it? What was the scariest day of Commander Abigail Shepard's life?" Garrus asked, leaning in conspiratorially.

"You can't guess?" she asked, smiling a challenge at him.

"That time you got spaced andâ€¦" Garrus got quiet for a moment, and then continued. "Well, that time you got spaced."

"That was pretty bad, but no," she replied.

"When you faced down that Destroyer on Rannoch?"

Shepard shook her head.

"When you nearly did a perfect swan dive into that chasm on Thessia?"

She shook her head again.

"When you faced down the Destroyer on Earth? Our joyride into the Collector base?"

"None of those things were the scariest day of my life," she said, looking into her glass.

"Then tell me, love of my life."

Shepard put her drink on the coffee table and twisted in her seat so that she could look at him.

"You really have no idea?"

It was Garrus' turn to shake his head.

Shepard lifted a hand to side of his face and ran her finger lightly and slowly over his rough, scarred skin, watching her fingers trace the damage.

He inhaled sharply and caught her hand, but didn't pull it away, just holding it there.

"No, after everything you've-

"Scariest day of my life. At the time I nearly lost my best friend, but when I think about it these days, I nearly lost _everything_."

"No," he said again, disbelieving.

Shepard quirked a smile. "There was a lot of blood. And your armour,

it was mangled to hell. And you kept wearing it for months on end. Do you realise how weird that was?"

He leaned forward and kissed her passionately, pressing her to his chest, toppling her over on the couch so that he had her pinned between his arms. She shifted so that she could wrap her legs around his waist and stroked the ruined side of his face again as he pulled back to memorize every line of her smile.

"You're sure?" he asked slowly, still incredulous.

Shepard laughed and kissed him again. "All I am saying is, please don't try stopping any more rockets your face, okay?"

* * *

><p>Despite having two kids, Garrus and Shepard might have lost their minds entirely if they had stopped working. Shortly after the end of the Reaper War Shepard resumed her Spectre duties on the Normandy, focusing on the clean up efforts in the major systems with Garrus as part of her crew. After adopting Konga, they both felt the need to stay closer to home. Garrus was offered a position training special task teams on Palaven which he accepted. Shepard reordered her team so that they did a lot of reconnaissance on their own before she came out and complete her investigations as a Spectre.<p>

When one of them wasn't available to watch the kids they managed to find an Asari babysitter who worked wonders with Konga and later Tali. Garrus was originally nervous leaving Konga with a young Asari but when Shepard reminded him that the "young" Asari was a few decades older than either of them he relented.

Occasionally when she needed back-up she would take Garrus with her on missions and it was on one such mission when Tibereon found them.

The Blood Pack on Omega got fed up with Aria T'Loc and instead of trying to remove her with a coup or a show of force, settled on eliminating her with extreme prejudice. The massive bomb they planted just below her quarters ripped through the floors of Omega like butter and traveled all the way down to the lower housing levels, cutting a swath of dead civilians.

Shepard had been on the satellite wrapping up an investigation of a Red Sand production operation when she felt the entire structure shake and headed out to see what she could do to help, Garrus at her heels.

It was chaos. The residences of the lower level had always lived in close quarters and all it meant was that the bomb ripped through more than its fair share of people. Mercenaries and Aria's people were shooting at each other through the smoke and dust of the wreckage. Dead and wounded were everywhere. Standing at the bomb's epicenter you could see several floors up. Everyone on Omega could count their blessings that the blast didn't tear through the outer walls and space them all.

Shooting any mercenary that moved, the two took on the grim task of organising civilians into groups to rescue anyone they could, while others found supplies. The tragedy brought together the residence of

Omega in a way that almost nothing else did.

Garrus, directing a rescue team, felt a tap on his armour and looked down to find a young Turian boy. The boy gestured and Garrus followed, signalling Shepard, and soon they came to the nearly decimated remains of a tiny apartment where a Turian woman's blue blood soaked the dust and rubble. She was alive but barely, and the two helped carry her to the make-shift hospital, but it was clearly that there was nothing that could be done to save the woman from her mortal injuries.

When Garrus checked on the boy later, his mother had passed away and he was standing outside the hospital despondently, staring at the chaos.

"Damn the Blood Pack. Damn all mercenaries straight to hell. Shepard, he doesn't have anyone. The last family he had died in that explosion."

Shepard didn't have to read minds to know what Garrus was thinking. He had a tired, worn look that she hadn't seen on him in several years, and he has fiddling with their comm system in the same way he used to fuss with the Normandy Thanix cannon. It was a distraction from the bigger, unsolvable problems out there.

"You want to take him home with us," she stated.

"Is it a bad idea?" he asked, not looking up.

Shepard watched him fiddle some more, his three, taloned fingers nimble, even in his heavy armour. She didn't need to think about it, not really. Instead she reflected on how much she loved him and his ginormous heart.

"I could think of a lot worse ideas," she replied, moving to sit next to him and rest her head on the shoulder-guard of his armour.

Garrus' hands slowed their movements and he rested his head on top of hers. "Yeah?"

"There are tons of worse ideas out there."

"So, three?"

She took his three-fingered hand in hers. "Three."

* * *

><p>On the eighth anniversary of the Reapers defeat on Earth they held a reunion.<p>

Ground zero, the area where Shepard had finally defeated the Reapers, had been painstakingly turned into a memorial park, all the rubble and Reaper tech cleared away to some dark government hole. The center of the park was a ring, and in it each major race had contributed a statute and beneath them were projected the names of all the casualties of the war, military or civilian, each race had on record. They were still being updated, even eight years later.

Inside the ring was the biggest monument, the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Off to the side was a statue of Shepard herself and beneath it was a list of everyone who ever crewed the Normandy under her.

They all gathered in the center of the ring with an honour guard of Alliance military to keep their reunion private. Jack and James were the last to arrive.

"Uncle James," called Tibs sighting them coming up the path. Konga went careening straight for James, headbutting James' waiting palm.

"Mother of God, Lola," he swore, "What are you feeding these kids?"

"Jack-Jack," crowed Tali, leaping at Jack, who quickly put up a biotic field to stop the three from piling into her. The three of them giggled and tried to push at the barrier. Jack slowly walked forward, causing them all to slide backward as she advanced.

"All right, who brought the monsters?" she shouted, pretending to be angry. The three giggled again.

James swooped in from around the shield and picked up Tali, holding her under one arm like a football. "Hello, Lolita," he said, tickling her as she pretended to struggle. Tibs latched onto James' clothes and used his sharp talons to climb him like a monkey.

"Hey, watch the claws," he complained as Tibs got a little too close to his groin.

"It's nothing you need," quipped Jack.

"That's not what I heard last night," grumbled James, reaching over with one of his massive hands to squeeze her ass.

"Pendejo," Jack shot back.

"Eww, they're being mushy, Momma," announced Tali.

"You're scaring the space rats," she added, but Jack couldn't hide the smile in her voice as she said it, still using her biotics to push Konga back towards the group.

"What did I just see? Is that Jack, the badass biotic bitch, sappy in love?" Joker asked loudly.

"Shut your mouth, bird-bones, or I'll shut it for you," retorted Jack.

Garrus and Shepard had run into the two of them on Citadel II, a half a year ago, coming out of the arcade together. Apparently Jack and James hadn't seen each other in a few years, when James, on an N7 assignment, had been told he would be getting some biotic backup. It turned out it was Jack and her students. Combined, the N7 and biotic forces had decimated the volus smuggling ring and their mercenaries quite handily. Then the two got to drinking and catching up on old times.

"We ended up in bed together and it was supposed to be a one-night stand, but he's clingy. I don't have the heart to tell him to get lost. Must be my better nature shining through," Jack explained to Treynor.

"One night stands," said Garrus into Shepard's ear, "They neeever work out."

"Well," added Treynor, "I may prefer the fairer sex but even I can admire James."

Cortez cleared his throat in agreement.

Shepard turned to admire James' broad, muscled back with the rest of the women. He was currently using two of her children to do bicep curls. Konga was watching in awe. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she caught Garrus looking at her appraisingly.

"Don't worry, your scars still make me weak at the knees."

"Hmâ€|maybe I should think about adding a few more."

Wrex clapped Garrus on the back hard enough to stagger him. "You married a true Krogan woman."

Garrus rubbed his shoulder, wishing for his armour. "You're telling me."

He turned to say as much to Miranda on his right but she was in a deep conversation with Liara about the Relays. Liara was researching pre-Prothean civilisations by examining the Relays, and Miranda was on a team focused on finding the most efficient way to repair them to full working condition. The two often ended up collaborating and were closer than they ever had been on the Normandy. It was a prickly relationship, but Garrus didn't doubt that, by the end, the two would be lifelong friends or maybe even more.

"â€|think of the fights they would get into. My God, all the raging hormones," said Jack to Kaidan.

"And what about traditions?" asked Wrex, intrigued.

"No more hormones than anywhere else where you find a group of teenagers. And of course there will be leave time and all holidays and rites will be observed. But think about the international co-operation that a school like that would foster. Whole generations of kids from all races learning to understand one another from a young age," answered Kaidan.

The second-ever human spectre had gone an interesting direction in life. Kaidan was involved in a committee that wanted to put together a roving international school where children from every race could attend, hoping to capitalize on the spirit of co-operation that had been fostered by the Reaper War.

"The school would have its own space station and each class could travel from world to world learning," Kaidan continued. "You could have the rare few Krogan biotics getting an education from other

biotics. It would give a chance for all races to learn from one another, train with one another and they would have access to resources that, combined, are the product of a billion years of civilisation. You could have your Krogan poets Wrex, and who knows, we could even see the first Asari Battlemaster."

"Ha! Good luck on that last one," Wrex scoffed, but his mind was already working.

"It's a very lofty goal, Kaidan," said Liara, who was listening in. "There would be so many treaties and international laws that would need to be created to make it work that it might take 100 years for a school like that to come about, but it might be worth it."

"You know, Liara," said Kaidan, "You could see it in your life time."

Liara colouring slightly. "I supposed I could."

"What do you think, Shepard?" asked Kaidan.

"It would be one of the best things to come out of this War," Shepard said, thoughtfully. "Let me know if you need any help with it."

Garrus did a quick head check on his kids, mixed in with Jacob and Brynn's brood and noticed Konga pause from chasing one of the other kids to stare at Samara, meditating on the grass. After several minutes of watching her sit absolutely still, eyes glowing, Konga sat down beside her and imitated her.

"Well I'll be," said Garrus to Shepard, "The cannonball is down."

"Did I hear that right, Joker?" asked Jacob, "You're skycar racing now?"

Everyone turned to look at Joker.

"You did," said Joker, leaning in, "And I am the best damn skycar racer the league has ever seen. They'll be putting me down in history books any day now."

"And the Alliance just lets you?"

"I, uh, retired from military duty," said Joker, but the subtext was in the silence. After EDI died, the black spaces between the stars must have seemed very cold and empty.

"You'll always have a place on the Normandy," said Shepard, giving him a gentle nudge, "But I can't tell you how excited I am to see one of my crew win the Traverse Cup this year."

"They've never seen moves like mine," he bragged. "They're all like 'hey, hop-a-long' when they see me coming, but watching their faces when I beat them by several seconds is the sweet nectar of the Gods."

"Nice to see you making friends," said Treynor, wryly.

The afternoon wore on pleasantly and as dusk began to fall the park turned the lights on on the statues. Before they got too rowdy Shepard stood on the steps of the largest memorial - the one dedicated to the Unknown Solider - and shouted for attention. Twenty-four eyes of her closest friends, and the eyes of their children turned to her. She ran a hand through her hair and looked at them, feeling her chest swell painfully with love and pride and a bitter sadness, all at once.

"I can't tell you how happy I am that we are all together one more time," she began, her powerful voice carrying out to all of them with ease. "We all stood together once, at the end of the world, so to stand here together in a time of peace is more than we ever dreamed was possible.

"And then there are those who have already gone ahead of us to the other side. Tali, EDI, Ashley, Grunt, Thane, and Mordin. I know that as long even one of us is alive, memories of them and their sacrifices won't die. That means they will be remembered for a very, very long time.

"There is a whole wide universe out there with an infinite number of futures that we are now free to choose. I can't tell you how glad I am to see it with you. You are my chosen family. But what I really wanted to say was: if the Reapers came back, if we had to fight the War againâ€¦ if I had to do it all over again, there is no one else I would rather save the universe with."

A cheer rose up starting with Wrex but soon Miranda and Garrus joined in, and all the others followed and it turned into a roar.

Shepard stood on the steps for a few moments longer to imprint the moment into her memories forever. Smiling faces and a sense of home like could be found no where else. It would be the last time her entire crew was ever together.

* * *

><p>The years past quickly. Shepard and Garrus' kids grew quickly too. Tali took an interest in combat training, much to Garrus' glee.<p>

"You're teaching an eight-year old how to use a sniper rifle?" asked Miranda, incredulously, one day when she came to visit. Garrus and Tali were on their way out to shoot blanks at their secret spot on top of Citadel II.

"I want her to date all the boys when she grows up," said Garrus, somewhat manically. "I dare them to try anything."

Miranda looked at Shepard for confirmation. Shepard shrugged. "It keeps them happyâ€¦ and mostly out of trouble."

Konga would grow up to be a massive Krogan, and Shepard had enrolled him in combat training to put his boundless energy to good use. Wrex had come by one day to get to know his grandson and had offered to give Konga some lessons himself whenever he was on Citadel II.

"By God, you may have raised the perfect Ambassador," he had muttered to Shepard on his way out. "You'll have to send him to me when he

hits puberty. You'll know when. You can take a Krogan out of Tuchanka but you can't take Tunchanka out of a Krogan."

Shepard made a face.

Tibs was the quietest of the three. He might even end up an artist, Garrus speculated, and then encouraged him.

The years passed and their children grew. And then an email came from Kaidan, pinging on Shepard's omni-tool. That evening she showed it to Garrus and they both spent the next day thinking about it. Shepard replied to Kaidan's email.

The two stood in front of the ship that would take their three children away.

All three of them, Konga, Tali, and Tibs had decided that Kaidan's new school, opening on a very small, trial basis, was where they wanted to get their education. If the program succeeded, in a 100 years it might be the greatest centre of learning the galaxy had ever seen. For now, the school would accept 100 students and three of them were Shepard-Vakarrians.

The three boarded the ship, full of smiles, Tali arm-in-arm with Tibs, Konga's arm slung over Tali's comparatively tiny shoulders.

Other parents of every race waved good-bye to their own kids. The press was having a field day and Shepard even caught sight of Diane Allers in the distance, interviewing one of the schoolboard trustees.

But in the crowd, Shepard and Garrus were left alone; just two parents instead of famous war heroes making a political statement.

"We're really going to have an empty nest," sighed Shepard. "Think of all the free time we're going to have to fill."

"I can think of a few things we can do to fill it." Garrus put a hand suggestively on her waist.

"I guess we're just going to have to throw ourselves into our work," she teased. In answer he pulled her so that her hip was buttressed firmly against his own.

They were silent as the door to ship closed and the sound of the engines began to build. She leaned her head on his shoulder and he turned and kissed the top of her head, his mandibles fluttering in her hair.

"What would I ever do with out you, Garrus?" she asked.

"Oh, probably launch a one-woman expedition through an uncharted Relay, eradicate all crime in the galaxy and colonise a few new worlds," he joked.

"How could I ever live without you, Garrus?" she asked, so softly that he almost didn't catch her words over the roar of the engine.

Garrus didn't reply. He held Shepard tighter and they both watched as the ship rose into the air, and then, hovering almost weightless between earth and heaven for a few moments, shot forward into the sky.

* * *

><p>Afterword - I didn't actually intend to write this story. I played Mass Effect straight through for the first time ever and came out the other side a little manic. In fact, I've never even written a fanfiction before. I've read a lot of books and fallen in love with a lot of fictional characters, but Garrus and Shepard have become my ultimate favourites. This was my way to say goodbye, since the series never gave me one. The story was really only meant to be about Shakarian, but it turns out my heart had a lot of love for everyone else too. I tried to give them all endings that suited them, maybe not happy endings, especially Joker, but at least endings in which they could be happy.<p>

The best part of Bioware games is going back and doing things differently the second time around. I will go back and save a few characters who didn't make it through the Suicide Mission but when I do do a second playthrough one thing won't change: Shepard and Garrus. In my mind, Shepard loves Vakarian. Always.

End
file.